

Four new races of birds from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands

BY

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(With one plate)

INTRODUCTION

In February 1964, I spent about three weeks collecting birds in South and Middle Andamans, followed by a short trip to Car Nicobar; during this period I obtained 312 specimens of some 110 species and subspecies. As no work has been done on the Andaman and Nicobar birds within recent years, I propose to try to get together all that has been recorded about them. In the absence of some of the relevant literature in Bombay, together with the necessity of consulting individuals and institutions abroad for the identification of such forms as are not available in the collections of the Bombay Natural History Society, this will take some time. In this preliminary note I am describing four new races, and hope it will be possible to complete my inquiries and dispose of several additional possibilities in the note under preparation.

Tytler, Davison, Hume, Butler, and others made large collections in the Andamans and Nicobars almost a hundred years ago. These were studied in the latter half of the last century when the relatively small differences on which subspecies are recognized were not accepted; though these differences were sometimes mentioned, the nomenclature was left unchanged. When subspecies were accepted in Indian ornithology, many of the island species were demoted to trinomial level. No ornithological field work has been done in that area for the last fifty years and there is no evidence to show how carefully the old collections were re-examined when revising the avifauna. These collections are not available to us and the British Museum (Natural History) tell me that, owing to pressure of work in other directions, it is not possible for them to re-examine their collections to check upon the correctness of some of my conclusions. The Zoological Survey of India have within recent years sent three expeditions to the Andamans,

and some birds were obtained. I am, however, informed that as their collections 'are being actively worked out' they are unable to send me a list of the material collected, to enable me to seek consultation where necessary. Under the circumstances, I have to rely on the evidence of the small series which I obtained but, considering that two of my findings are supported by the statements made by earlier workers with large series before them, I do not think that my conclusions are unjustified and that I shall be accused of littering the ornithological highway.

1. AMAURORNIS PHOENICURUS

Hume (1874, *Stray Feathers* 2 : 300) referred to several specimens of *Amaurornis phoenicurus* from the Andamans and Nicobars differing from those from India (Plate, fig. 1) in :

(a) the width of the white frontal band, exceeding .45 inch (11.4 mm.) and even an inch (25 mm.),

(b) much less white on the undersurface, the stripe ceasing on the upper abdomen in Nicobar birds, and

(c) the lower belly, vent, and tibial plumes being chestnut, and only slightly paler than the lower tail coverts, as against white or faintly tinged rufescent in Indian birds.

He stressed the fact that these differences are only apparent in adult birds.

Sharpe (1894, CAT. BDS. BRIT. MUS. 23 : 162) described *insularis* from the Andamans and Nicobars as similar to *phoenicurus*, but everywhere much darker dingy olive above, the sides of the breast blackish with only a slight wash of dull olive and scarcely any appearance of slaty grey, and the white of the forehead and eyebrow much more extended than in true *phoenicurus*. This was on an examination of 13 specimens from both the groups of islands.

Blanford (1898, FAUNA 4 : 174) referred to the extensive white on the head and the narrow stripe down the breast. He agreed that *insularis* was a well-marked race, but stated that some of the peculiarities were sometimes found in the mainland specimens. Stuart Baker (1928, FAUNA 6 : 25) accepted the race *insularis* but restricted it to the Andamans, not saying what form was found in the Nicobars. He described it as the darkest of all the Indian forms, with more extensive white on the forehead, and the breast blackish grey with very little olive tint. Ripley in the SYNOPSIS placed *insularis* in both the Andamans and Nicobars.

I have only one specimen each from South Andaman and Car Nicobar.

From the literature and material available to me, I cannot help feeling that this apparent confusion is due to the failure of Hume, Sharpe, and Stuart Baker to examine the birds from the Andamans and Nicobars separately.

The Andaman bird (Plate, fig. 2) has the white of the breast restricted to a small area on the upper breast, which is joined to the white of the underbelly by a narrow strip in the centre. The olive-green wash above and below is less pronounced, and the undertail coverts and tibial plumes are more brown and less chestnut than in Indian birds, which it resembles in other respects.

The Car Nicobar bird (Plate, fig. 3) has the whole head and nape almost all-white except for irregular spots of grey on the crown and nape. There is no olive-green on either the upper or lower parts, and though there is more white on the breast than in the Andaman bird, the middle stripe is narrower and does not appear, from the skin as prepared, to connect unbroken with the white of the underbelly. The undertail coverts and tibial plumes are as in the Andaman bird.

Young birds in India, *phoenicurus*, show almost no white on the forehead, and it is probable that the Nicobar birds pass through a stage when the white on the head is not so extensive.

Butler (1900, Birds of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 13 : 144) handled over 150 specimens in the Andamans (in traps set for *Rallus canningi*) and stated that he had never found one with the extensive white on the head seen in Nicobar birds. P. B. Shekar, Field Assistant of the Bombay Natural History Society, who was with me on this trip and who collected this specimen in Car Nicobar, remembers seeing others in which the white head was noticeable.

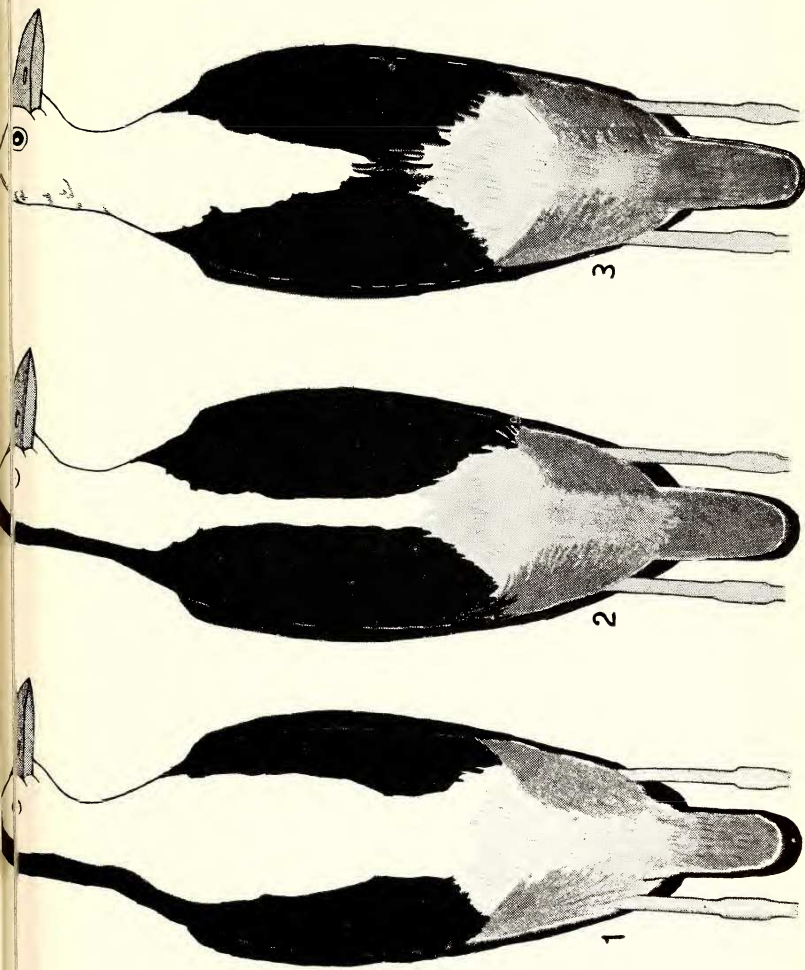
In view of the above, I think I am justified in restricting *insularis* to the Andamans, and I separate the birds from Car Nicobar as:

***Amaurornis phoenicurus leucocephalus* subsp. nov.**

Holotype: ♀ collected by P. B. Shekar on Car Nicobar on 14 March 1964, and in the Bombay Natural History Society's collection bearing Register No. 21547. The wing measures 163 mm.

2. *DUCULA AENEA*

Hume (1874, *Stray Feathers* 2 : 261) drew attention to the birds from the Andamans being in series larger, greener, with deeper-coloured undertail coverts, and having whiter foreheads and throats



Amaurornis phoenicurus (India); 2. *A. p. insularis* (Andamans); 3. *A. p. leucocephalus* ssp. nov. (Car Nicobars)
E. Reuben del.

than a series from any place in India, Burma, or Ceylon. He also noted that none of his 25 specimens from the Andamans had such a brilliantly red copper gloss as some continental examples exhibited. Stuart Baker (FAUNA 5 : 208) also noticed the greater prominence of white on the forehead but in a footnote on the previous page referred to Hartert (*Nov. Zool.* 25 : 346; 1918) showing that the Andaman bird is not separable from the Indian *sylvatica*. Hartert (loc. cit.) only says of *sylvatica*: 'This form seems to extend to the Andaman Islands.' Peters (1937, CHECK-LIST OF BIRDS OF THE WORLD 3) in a footnote to *sylvatica* at p. 46 states: 'The Andaman birds possibly represent a distinct race.'

An examination of the present series (5 ♂♂, 4 ♀♀) together with the other material and literature in Bombay leads to the following findings:

The white of the forehead and the chin (except in one female) is strikingly more pronounced than in any from south, central, or north-eastern India. The green feathers of the upper surface show almost no copper gloss and many on the back and on the wing coverts are broadly tipped with dark blue (almost black). The tail shows less green and is not concolorous with the back as in the others. While some of these differences may to some extent be seasonal, sexual, and/or due to the age of the individuals, they are sufficiently constant to permit the birds being picked out from among the others.

Their measurements (in mm.) are compared below with those of others in the Bombay collection:

	♂♂	Wings		♀♀	Wings	
Andamans	13*	222-257	av. 236	8	212-240	av. 227
Salem, Madras	1	212	212			
Orissa	3	219-235	226.6			
Bastar, M.P.	1	224	224	2	218-219	218.5
Chanda, Maharashtra	2	220-230	225			
Assam	1	235	235			
Burma	2	231-245	238			
Kanara, Mysore	2	222-226	224			
	♂♂	Tails		♀♀	Tails	
Andamans	5	155-161	av. 157.6	4	137-146	av. 142.25
Salem, Madras	1	129	129			
Orissa	3	137-150	143			
Bastar, M.P.	1	143	143	2	135-140	137.5
Chanda, Maharashtra	2	126-147	136.5			
Assam	1	142	142			
Burma	2	129-144	136.5			
Kanara, Mysore	2	133-154	143.5			

* Includes birds shot for the pot, whose tails were not measured.

Apart from the larger size of the wing, the tails of the Andaman males are distinctly longer than in any others from India. They differ from typical *aenea* from Malaya in the absence of the pinkish tinge on the cheeks, ear coverts, and throat (which are grey as in *sylvatica* from India). The Nicobar race, *nicobarica* Pelzeln, is a distinctly larger bird, with the undertail coverts dingy brown and not bright chestnut as in the other races. I therefore separate the Andaman birds as:

***Ducula aenea andamanica* subsp. nov.¹**

Holotype: ♂ collected by me at Betapur, Middle Andamans, on 23 February 1964 and in the Bombay Natural History Society's collection bearing Register No. 21546.

Paratypes: 3 ♂♂ Nos. 21548, 21549, 21553, 2 ♀♀ Nos. 21550, 21552 in Society's collection, 1 ♂ in University Zoological Museum, Berlin, 1 ♀ in Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, and 1 ♀ in National Museum, Singapore.

Stuart Baker (FAUNA 5 : 207) refers to the bill of the typical form being white at the tip. In the Andaman birds this was not so in life, but became noticeably white within a couple of months.

3. PELARGOPSIS CAPENSIS

The Andaman birds are included with *burmanica* Sharpe (Taunghoo, Burma) in both Stuart Baker's FAUNA and Ripley's SYNOPSIS. Stuart Baker notes that birds from the Andamans are very pale and worn and rather small in size but with larger bills. Earlier, in Hand-list of Birds of the Indian Empire (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 28 : 316), he referred to '*Ramphalcyon capensis osmastonii* Stuart Baker, described from the Andamans in *Bull. B. O. C. . .*' but gave no details. I have not been able to find this either in *Bull. B. O. C.* or in Stuart Baker's volume of synonyms appended to the FAUNA. So it would appear that the description was never published and the name remains a *nomen nudum* (as already noted by Laubmann, vide *Ibis*, 1931, p. 314).

Two females collected at Chiria Tapoo, South Andaman, and Long Island, Middle Andamans, have their wings 147-156 mm. (146-165 for *burmanica* in FAUNA) and bills 80, 80 mm. (72-84). These measurements overlap, but the heads of the Andaman birds are much paler than those of specimens of *burmanica* from Prome (♀, 17th January) and Lower Chindwin (♂, 28th January). The dark brown

¹ After this went to the press, Dr. B. Biswas, Zoological Survey of India, informed me that he agreed with my finding.

head of *capensis* (India) and the lighter head of *burmanica* are all uniformly coloured, while in the Andaman birds, the greyish feathers of the head have broad pale tips and margins giving a broken effect which Hume referred to as whitey-brown. Ball [*Jour. Asiatic Soc. Bengal*, 1872, 4 (2) : 277] also refers to Andaman birds as differing from *burmanica* in the more albescent head. The collar in my specimens is very distinct. The upper wing coverts have very little of the blue so prominent in *capensis*, and are almost all grey as in *burmanica*. The intensity of the chestnut on the underpart appears to be a variable character in this species. The Nicobar race *intermedia* Hume is separable by the crown being ochraceous and concolorous with the collar.

On these differences I separate the Andaman birds and, in recognition of the hard work in the field and in the preparation of skins done by P. B. Shekar, I name them as:

***Pelargopsis capensis shekarii* subsp. nov.**

Holotype: ♀ collected by me at Chiria Tapoo, South Andaman, on 15 February 1964, and in the Bombay Natural History Society's collection bearing Register No. 21544.

Paratype: ♀ in the Society's collection bearing No. 21545.

4. IRENA PUELLA

For many years only one form of this widely distributed Indo-Malayan species was recognized from Indian limits, of which the type locality 'India' was restricted to Travancore by Stuart Baker. The Malayan birds were separated as *malayensis* by Horsfield & Moore by their tail coverts being longer, almost reaching the tip of the tail.

Whistler & Kinnear (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 36 : 582) drew attention to north Indian birds being larger than those from south India :

Wings of 12 adult males from the south : 123-131 mm.,

Wings of 10 adult males from Sikkim and the Duars : 133.5-141 mm., and separated the former as *sikkimensis*, type locality Sukna, Darjeeling District. Ripley in the SYNOPSIS has listed the Andaman and Nicobar birds as of this race. Though Blanford (old FAUNA) also referred to the occurrence of this species in the Nicobars, I can find no original record, except for Butler's (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 12 : 390) statement that it is found in both groups. If it occurs in the Nicobars, the race remains to be determined.

The six specimens collected (3 adult males, 2 immature males, and 1 female) do not differ from Indian birds in colour or length of tail